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THE PAVEMENT OF THE CATHEDRAL OF SIENA

The Pavement of the Cathedral of Siena

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The pavement of the Cathedral of Siena offers us a unique example of decoration, so characteristic, that it is very difficult to find, even in a reduced scale, such an example in older times. However, in the portal of the Duomo in Lucca, there is a frieze with figures of men and animals in white, red and black marble with touches of graffito to give relief to the scene, and which dates back to 1233. Before this time, the Romanesque artists had sometimes inserted a few tondi with geometrical designs enclosing Christian symbols, like the doves going to water at a chalice; but in this manner it was only an intarsio (inlaid) of white on black, without any trace of graffito, as can be seen, for example in the Church of Saint Miniato al Monte over Florence. While the fragments in Lucca and the pavement in Siena. on which besides the use of various colours of marble, there is the addition of graffito, which gives relief to the scenes already characterized by the use of polychrome material: they are a new invention of which we have no example unless we go back to the Roman mosaics, the technièque of whic though so fundamentally different.

However, if we are to trust Vasari; Duccio di Boninsegna was the inventor of this kind of art and much more, he had made a few designs for the pavement of the Duomo. Some critics doubt Vasari's declarations,

as the old pavement of the Duomo has disappeared completely. Nowadays it is impossible to control the affirmation which though it may be well relied on, by the fact that Duccio may have taken the Lucchese tradition and given it a new impetus. Anyhow, it is evident from the use of the new way of paving that was taken a few years after Duccio's death, how this kind must have been well known to the Sienese artist, who appear at once masters of this new technique.

The oldest document referring to the execution of a part of the new pavement dates back to 1369-70, when the people of the town having given up the plan of enlarging the cathedral, turned their cares to adorning, and completing the present one.

Besides one part of the pavement under the dome, in front of the high altar (perhaps the stories that were later replaced with those by Franchi), the following were then made, the square of the wheel of Fortune, in the central nave, and the artists mentioned are Antonio di Brunaccio, Sano di Marco and Francesco di Ser Antonio. The rest of the church, it is said, was paved with slabs of marble with inlaid ornamental designs or a combination of geometrical squares.

In 1406 Marchese di Adamo made the wheel in the centre of which there is the figure of Fortress, in front of the sacristy, while previously the mosaic square had been made in the central nave; it shows the symbols of Siena and of her friends.

In 1423, under the direction of Domenico di Niccolò dei Cori, there was a retaking of the work; the ambulacrum of the choir between the altar of Saint Ansano and the one of the Holy Sacrament was adorned

with various stories and figures. Besides the two large compositions of the massacre of the Philistines and the battle against Amorrean Kings, there is in the centre the tondo (circle) in which David the Psalmist sits on a throne, while smaller squares show David with a sling and Goliath the giant, Salomon and Joshua. It is said that David and the two figures of David with a sling and Goliath are works by Niccolò, While Paolo di Martino and others were probably the artists of the other compositions and ornamental friezes.

When the work of the ambulacrum of the choir was over, the continuation of the work for the right transept was begun by Domenico di Bartolo di Ghezzo making the scene of the Emperor Sigismund in 1434; and by Pietro del Minella making the Death of Absalom.

Shortly after, Antonio Federighi made the marvellous allegory of the seven ages of man in front of the present Chapel del Voto.

After an interval of about 30 years, the works of the pavement were retaken again. This time the left transept was begun, for which the imposing composition of the Siege of Bethulia was designed. Differently attributed to Matteo di Giovanni and Urbano da Cortona, it was materially made by Antonio Federighi.

But the greatest impetus to the accomplishment of the pavement was given by the new Rector of the Opera del Duomo, Alberto Aringhieri. In the period of his function, that is from 1481 to 1498, besides works of great importance, such as the chapel of Saint John and the Baptistery of Saint John, the continuation of the pavement of the Duomo was particulary taken care of. The first ti be made was Hermes Trismegisto, put

at the beginning of the main nave, and the author of which, is said to be Giovanni di Maestro Stefano. After these come the sibyls of the two side naves, the designs of which were made by the best artists of that time, among these were Matteo di Giovanni, Antonio Federighi, Guidoccio Cozzarelli and Neroccio di Bartolomeo. Successively, the ornament of the right transept was completed; representing the two great stories of the « Expulsion of Herod » designed by Benvenuto di Giovanni del Guasta, and the « Massacre of the Innocents » by Matteo di Giovanni, which is perhaps the finest piece of the entire pavement. And finally the scenè of the story of « Jepthah's Daughter » by Bastiano di Francesco di Sano, thus completing also the left transept. And it is wonderful to think that this imposing work was made exactly when Siena was crossing one of the most agitated period of her history.

In 1505 Pituricchio completed, with the « Allegory of Fortune », the graffiti of the central nave, and with him, ends this first manner of marble ornamentation of the pavement. In Fact, when in 1518 it was continued and accomplished what remained infinished, Beccafumi created a new technique by using white and gray and black marble and graffiti on white and on gray, attaining the effect of a real Charcoal drawing full of shades. The wonderful scenes of the life of Moses, the « Sacrifice of Abraham » and the « Prophet Elijah » are by himself. They are distributed between the High Altar and the space under the cupola.

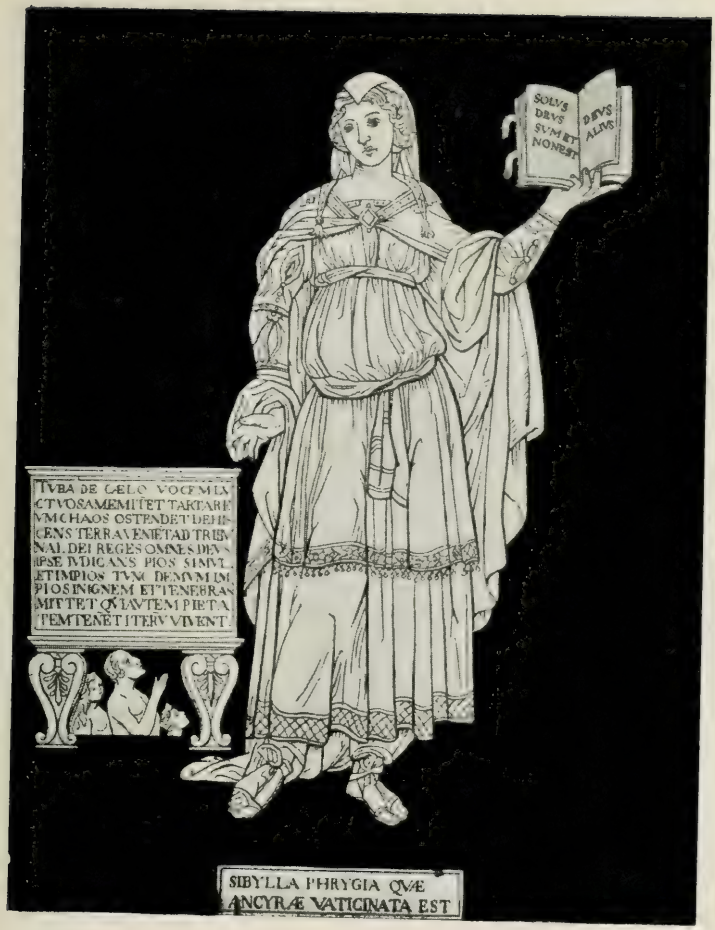
Thus the pavement was completed; but the necessary cares to keep it and renew it when it was worn out by the walking of the people, was never left. Passing over

the minor works, we get to 1878, when, being the three large hexagons under la cupola and a few smaller diamonds completely worn out, Alessandro Franchi designed the beautiful scenese of Elijah prophesing « Ahab's death », the « Death of Ahab », « Eijah's Ascension to Heaven » and other minor scenes, which complete the series begun by Beccafumi in the other scenes placed near these. In the renewed haxagons there were before these, other scenes, that is, parables of the « Beam in the Eye », the one showing the « Blind-man leading a Blind-man », and « An Old-man giving Alms », the remains of which are now in the « Museum of the Opera » and which date back to 1373 and 1433.

These are the news we have of this wonderful work which has analogies with mosaic, inlaid wood and also painting, but is instead something original and unique which has given the Sienese artists an everlasting fame, and to our Cathedral an ornament which has no equal in the world.

Guidoccio Cozzarelli - The Libyan Sibyl

Neroccio Landi - The Ellespontine Sibyl


SOLVS DEVS SVM ET NON EST
DEVS ALIVS
TVBA DE CÆLO VOCEM MA
GTVO SAMEMITTET TARTARE
VM CHAOS OSTENDET DEHI
CENS TERRA VENIET AD TRIBV
NAL DEI REGES OMNES DEVS
IPSE IVDICANS PIOS SIMVL
ET IMPIOS TVNC DEMVM IM
PIOS IGNEM ET TENEBRAS
MITTET QVI AVTEM PIETA
TEM TENET ITERVM VIVENT
SIBYLLA PHRYGIA QVÆ
ANCYRÆ VATICINATA EST

Vito di Marco - The Phrygian Sibyl

Matteo di Giovanni - The Samian and Phrygian sibyls

Benvenuto di Giovanni - The Albunean Sibyl

Urbano da Cortona - The Persian Sibyl

Antonio Federighi - The Erythraean Sibyl

Giovanni di Stefano - The Cuman Sibyl

Vito di Marco - The Cumaean Sibyl

Vito di Marco - The Delphic Sibyl

Giovanni di Stefano - Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus

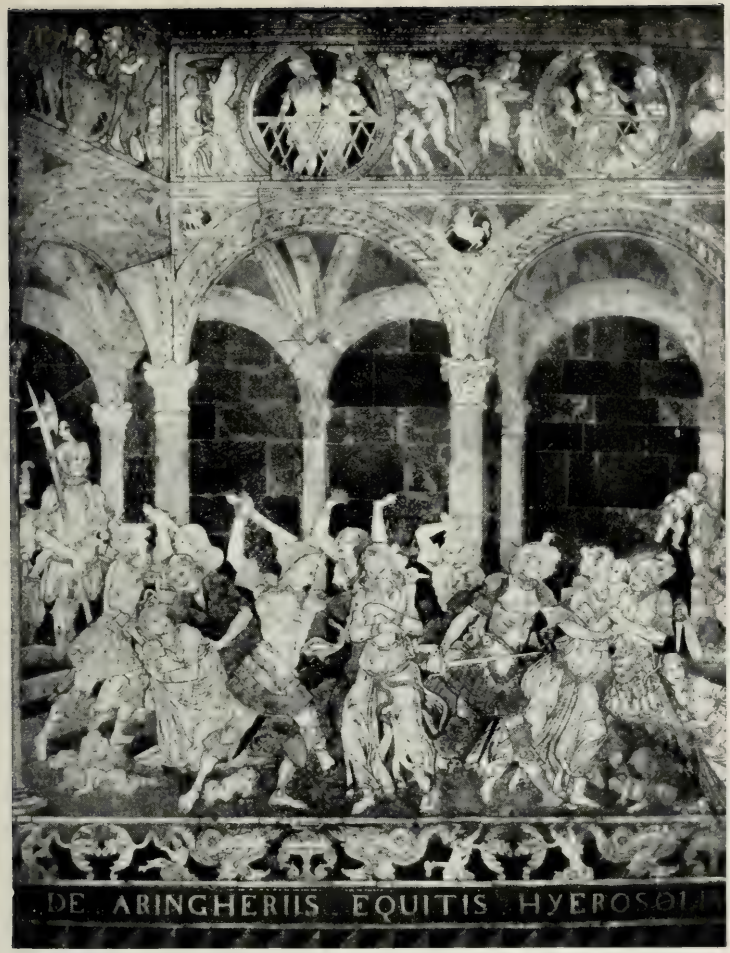
Secolo XIV - Sienna and Towns allied

Bernardino Betti - Human life under the sway of Fortune

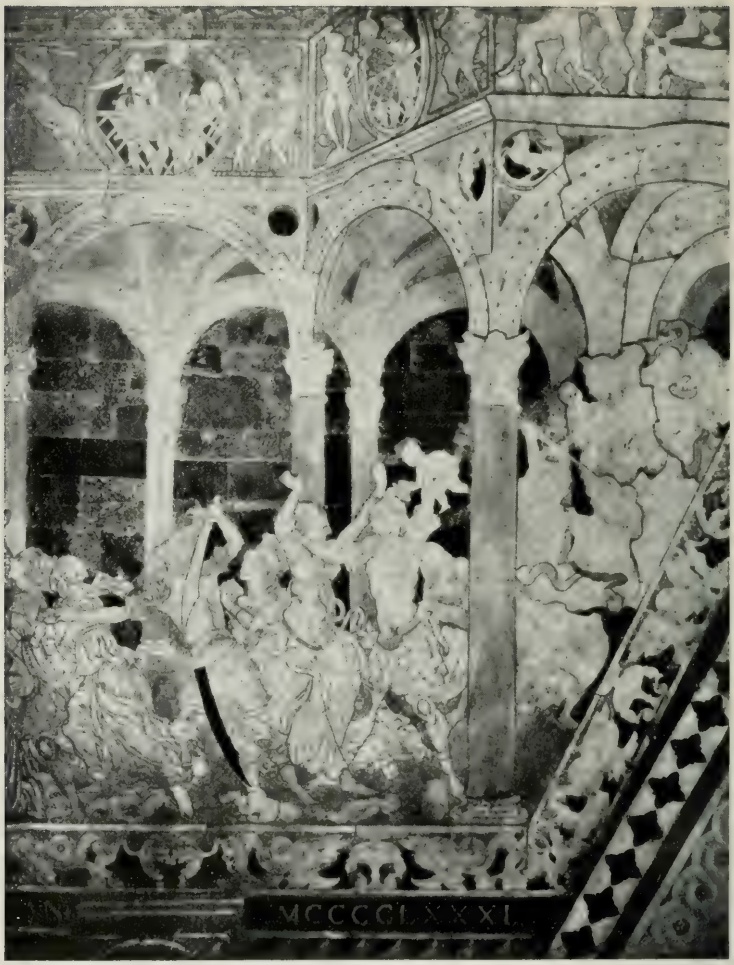
Bernardino Betti - Fortune's wheel

Benvenuto di Giovanni - The expulsion of Herod

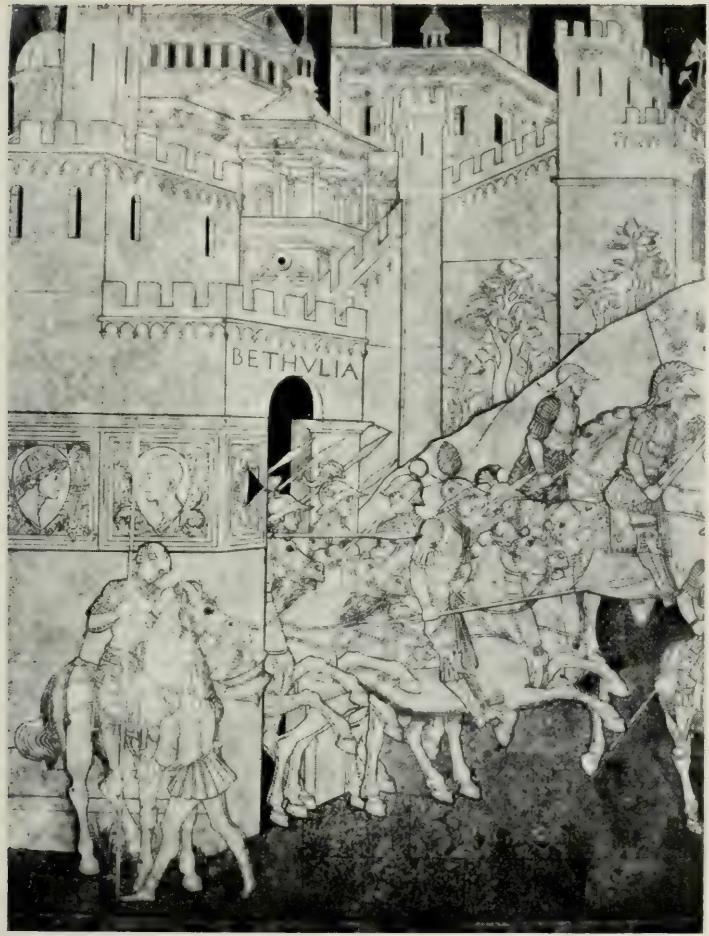
Matteo di Giovanni - The massacre of the Innocents (detail)



Matteo di Giovanni - The massacre of the Innocents (detail)



Matteo di Giovanni - The massacre of the innocents (detail)



Urbano da Cortona - Judith liberates Bethulia (detail)

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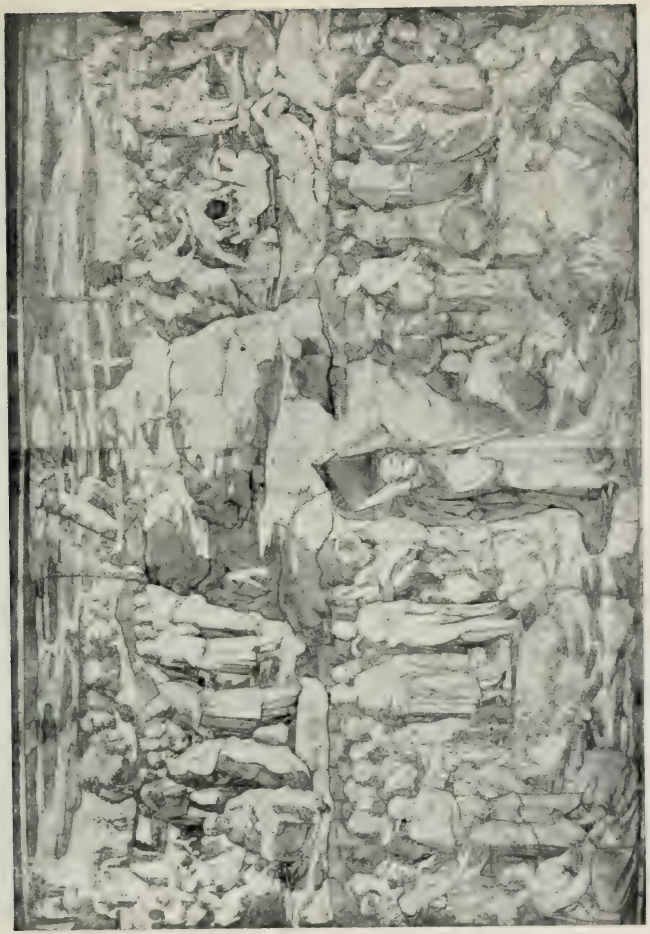
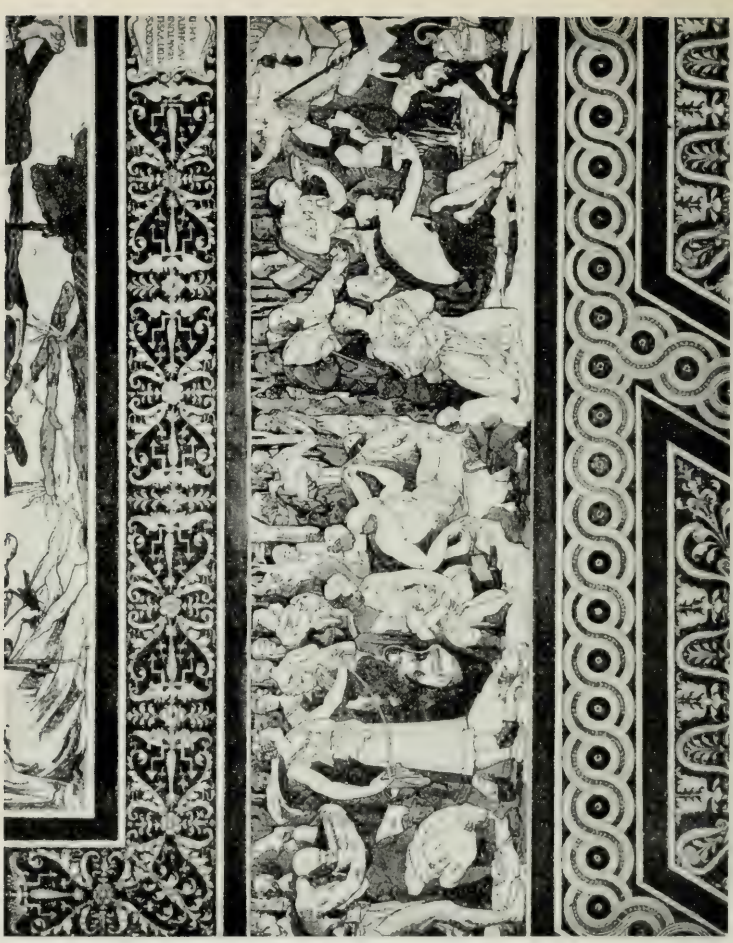
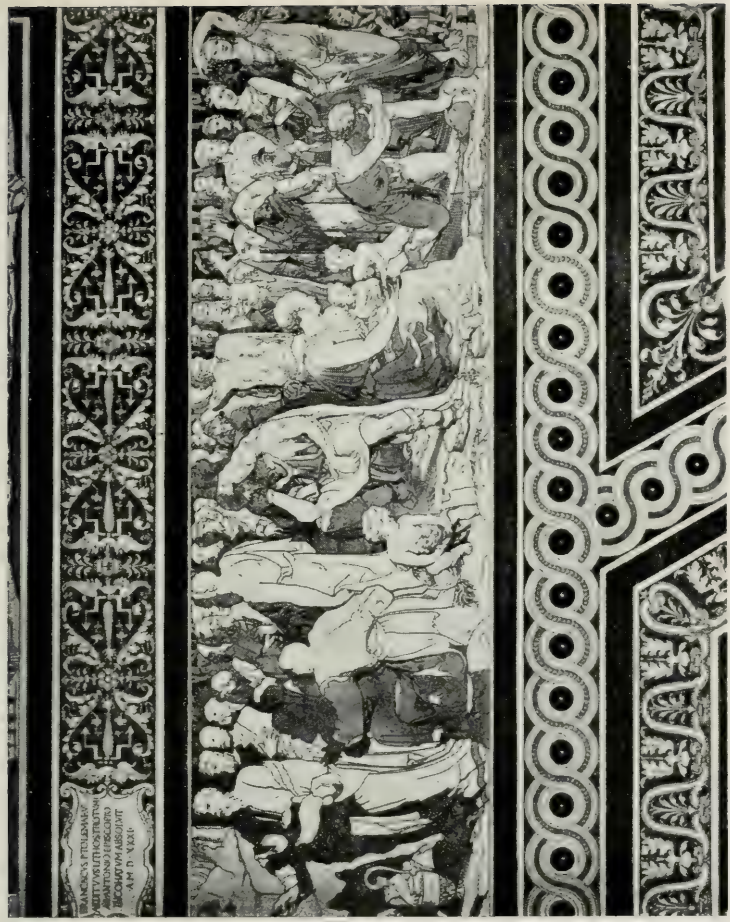


Domenico Beccafumi - Moses receives the tables of the Law



Domenico Beccafumi - Moses making water flow



Domenico Beccafumi - Moses making water flow

Domenico di Bartolo - The Emperor Sigismondo on throne

Pietro del Minella - The death of Absalom

Sebastiano di Francesco - Story of Jephthah (detail)

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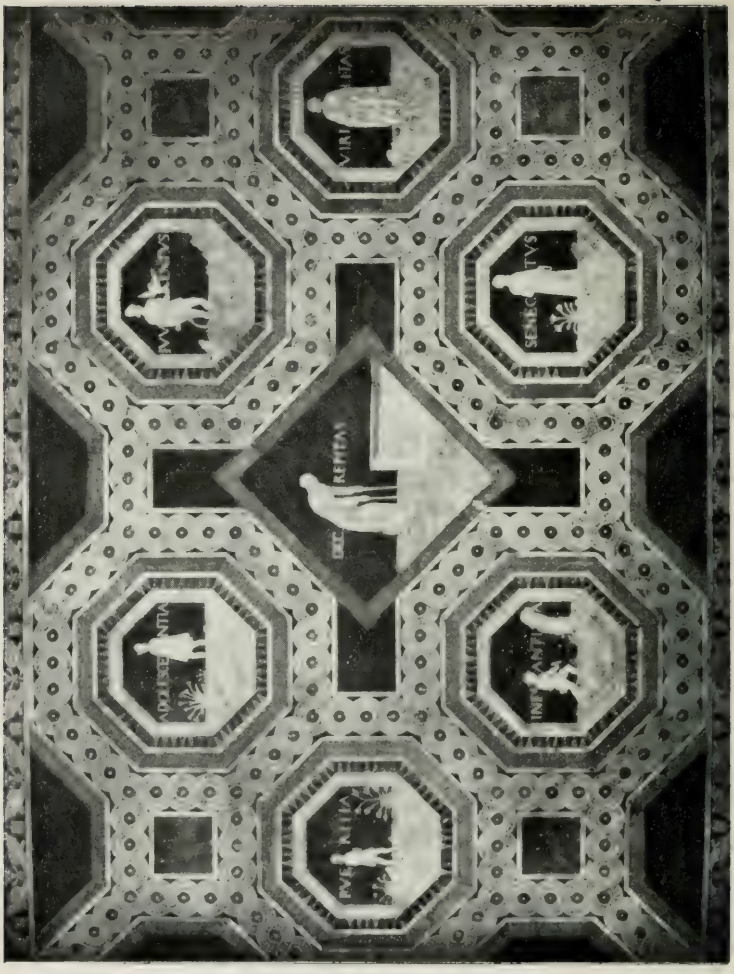


Antonio Federighi - The seven ages of man

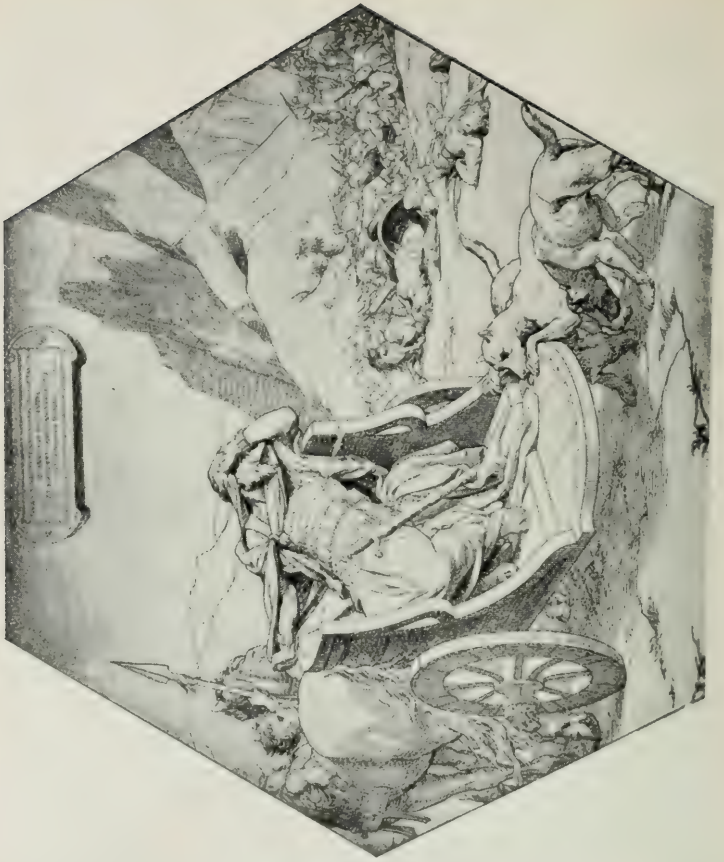
Alessandro Franchi - Charity

Alessandro Franchi - **Religion**

Alessandro Franchi - Hope

Alessandro Franchi - Faith

lessandro Franchi - Elijah brings the son of the widow to life again



Alessandro Franchi - Tte death of Acab

Alessandro Franchi - Elijah fed by the ravens

Domenico Beccafumi - The sacrifice of Acab

Domenico Beccafumi - The sacrifice of Elijah

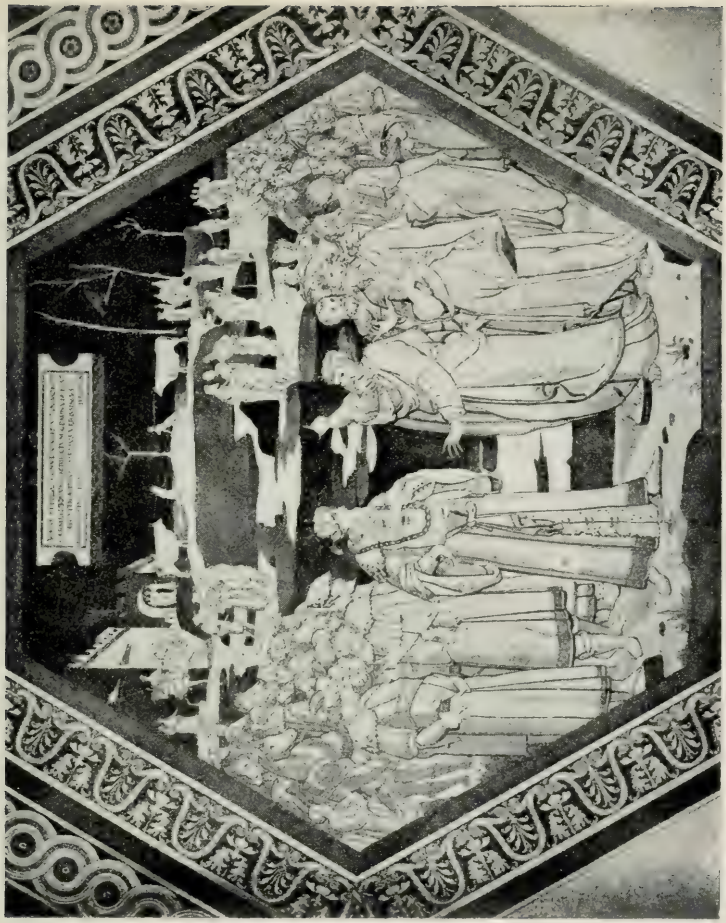
Domenico Beccafumi - Killing the false prophets of Baal

Alessandro Franchi - Elijah anoints Jehu, king of Israel

Alessandro Franchi - Elijah prophesies death to Acab

Alessandro Franchi - Elijah asks for breay of the widow

Alessandro Franchi - The triumph of Elijah



Domenico Beccafumi - The pact between Elijah and Acab

Alessandro Franchi - Detail of the expulsion of the king Herod

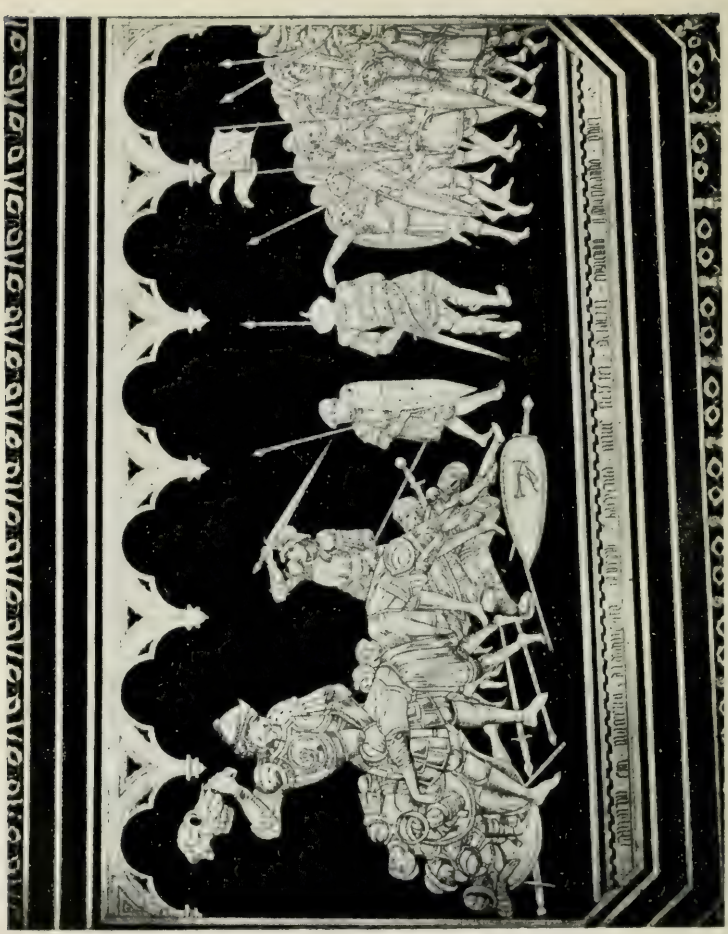
Paolo di Martino - The five kings hanged

Domenico di Niccolò - David the psalmist

Domenico di Niccolò - Young David

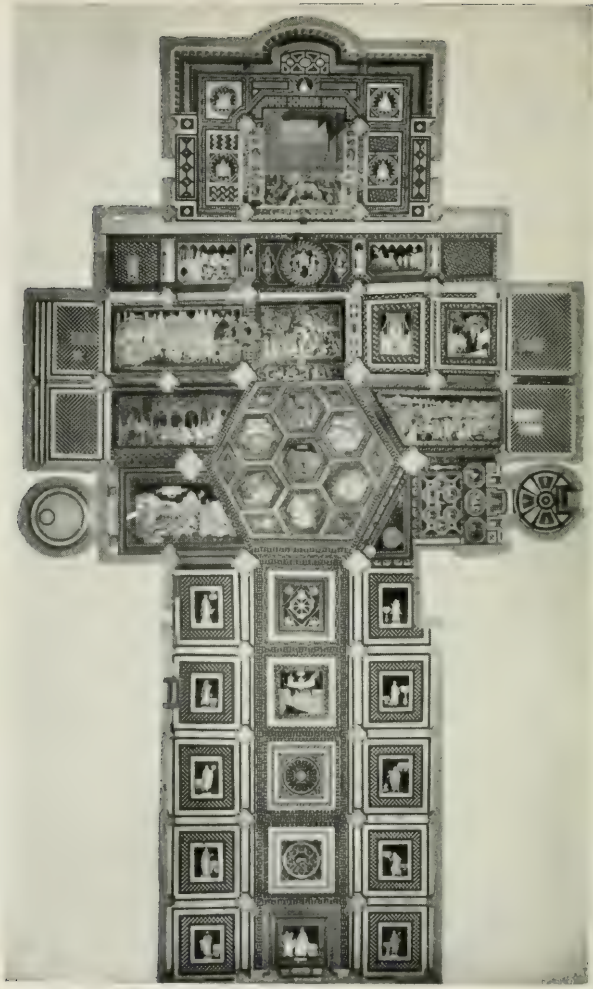
Domenico di Niccolò - The giant Goliath

Paolo di Martino - Moses and Joshua



Paolo di Martino - Samson fighting the Philistines

Domenico Beccafumi - Abraham sacrifying Isaac



Plan of the pavement

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